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Ethics Thought Brief – Semi-centralized Promotion

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Introduction

Upon entry to the United States Army, an NCO immediately makes an indelible impression on the trainee's mindset. In most circumstances, the Soldier graduates and immediately yearns to grow to be like his or her first NCO mentor. The Soldier trains hard, enrolls in correspondence course, and takes college classes. This transformation process inevitably culminates in that Soldier's appearance before a local promotion board and eventual promotion. But, what happens if the Soldier is not promoted?

Problem

The first question, we find ourselves asking is, why was the Soldier not promoted? The reasons are as varied as the Soldier is but generally fall into a couple of major categories. Particularly in highly competitive skills whose points historically remain near the maximum 800 point level, the two areas that are most contentious and inconsistent are commander's points and board points. These two categories are mostly subjective in nature. As such, these two areas are the bane of many a Soldier that fails to earn promotion. As the Soldier seeks answers to why he or she did not achieve the maximum of 150 points available for each of these categories, the dilemma begins to come into focus. The Soldier and, frequently, his squad leader are typically ungratified by some rhetoric of how the system is supposed to work. Given the current operations tempo that arguably has produced a set of haves and have not amongst those competing for promotion, how do leaders level that playing field yet ethically enforce the standard as set forth by our United States Army. Or stated another way, how do the Commander and the promotion board equally assess and award points to those recommended for promotion regardless of physical location (i.e. the battlefields of Afghanistan or the halls of Walter Reed),

Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), or mission (i.e. detailed to the local gym or truck driver in Iraq).

Recommendation

I would recommend that Army leadership seriously consider Course of Action (COA) #3. Under this COA, the commander's points and promotion board points are eliminated. In their stead, two new categories will be created. These two areas are evaluation of the forty warrior tasks and eleven battle drills; and, a test of leadership related topics in scenario driven situations comparable to those previously covered by local promotion boards. Devise a point breakout for these two new completely objective areas that equate to the maximum of 150 points awarded by the categories replaced. The warrior skills required would be tested at the installation level by a designated team that compares Soldier performance against stated Army standards. The written test will also be tested at the installation level by the same team that tests the warrior skills. The test would utilize real world scenarios that leaders must face (think questions similar to Audie Murphy board questions). This new system has the additional benefit of being sustainable whether in garrison or deployed to a combat zone.

Background

Currently, commanders award points to Soldiers recommended for promotion in each of five categories. These categories are Competence, Military Bearing, Leadership, Training, and Responsibility and Accountability with thirty points available in each area. Local promotion boards are held by the CSM to evaluate potential promotion candidates in each of six categories. These categories are Appearance and Self-Confidence, Oral Expression and conversational Skills, World Affairs, Military Programs, Basic Soldier Skills, and Attitude with twenty-five points available in each area. However, inconsistencies exist across our Army with: determining

an even standard for which a commander is to evaluate the Soldier recommended for promotion; grading from one Soldier to the next that appears before the local promotion board; and, guidance given by local promotion boards as to intent and award of points by the board.

Facts

1. Currently, Commanders evaluate Soldiers in five categories to award a possible 150 points towards promotion.
2. Currently, local promotion boards evaluate Soldiers in six categories to award a possible 150 points towards promotion.
3. Current system does not evaluate critical leader skills in scenario driven situations.
4. Commander is the promotion authority currently and for all recommendations.
5. Promotion policy is established to select and promote those most highly qualified and showing potential to perform at next higher level of responsibility.

Assumptions

1. Local promotion boards are currently held at a rate of once per month.
2. Most commanders award the maximum 150 points to promotion candidates based on a set of norms that has been established Army-wide.
3. Boards award points differently based on situation, mission, location, and guidance.
4. Warrior skill testing is a major training event that is tested periodically due to limitations of resources and Soldier availability.
5. Army leadership truly wants to promote and retain the best qualified and most competent leaders based on a standard objective based system.

Courses of Action

1. Course of Action 1. Change Nothing. Promotion points continue to be awarded as set forth in AR 600-8-19.

A. Advantages. The system and regulatory guidance are already in place. This requires no action and is, therefore, the easiest option.

B. Disadvantages. The current system is not equally enforced across the board. Most commanders award the maximum points, thereby, eliminating this category as a discriminator. Boards evaluate differently based on setting as it relates to location and mission. Inequity is created by this subjective analysis and subsequent award of points by local promotion boards. Warrior tasks and battle drills continue to be evaluated at the unit level taxing manpower and limiting available test periods. No current written test exists to evaluate Soldiers on scenario driven leadership challenges. Soldier is required to learn in real world situation rather than through training.

2. Course of Action 2. Eliminate Commander's points and Promotion Board Evaluations.

Change the guidance in AR 600-8-19 and adjust the promotion point worksheet accordingly.

A. Advantages. Easy transition to new system since the remaining categories are scored the same. It eliminates the need to hold local promotion boards thus saving many Soldier hours of labor used in actual conduct and proceedings of board.

B. Disadvantages. No tool would exist to evaluate the Soldier on critical skills required of the junior NCO. Warrior tasks and battle drills continue to be evaluated at the unit level taxing manpower and limiting the test periods available to Soldiers. No current written test exists to evaluate Soldiers on scenario driven leadership challenges. Soldier is required to learn in real world situation rather than through training.

3. Course of Action 3. Replace the Commander's points and the board points with a written test of scenario driven leadership challenges and evaluation of tactical capabilities on the forty warrior task and eleven battle drills at the installation level.

A. Advantages. Subjective analysis is eliminated in favor of objective standard.

Warrior skills proficiency required by the global war on terror become focus for advancement thus re-enforcing the warrior ethos. Leadership challenges are driven down to lower levels to grow more competent junior NCOs that bear the brunt of tactical decision-making driven by current state of world affairs. Installation level testing eliminates redundancy, inconsistencies and manpower issues created by current board system and warrior skill testing. One hundred percent of unit personnel available for unit and for testing as determined by local commander.

B. Disadvantages. AR 600-8-19 would need to be updated to reflect changes.

Comparison

The method currently used is COA 1. This method is riddled with inconsistencies that have led to ethical dilemmas in the enforcement of perceived policy by Commanders and local promotion boards. The Global War on Terror (GWOT) has placed the onus to uphold a subjective standard on ill positioned commanders and Command Sergeants Major. These two are consistently faced with the task of determining how to equally enforce the standard for the deployed Soldier versus the Soldier in garrison. Frequently, the resulting decision is to relax the proceedings. This does not allow for growth of the Soldier and fails to address the grave concerns of developing the Soldier leader for the GWOT. Additionally, since the proceedings are typically conducted at the battalion or brigade level, lack of consistency and uniformity exist throughout the Army. In COA 2, these biases are eliminated, as are the requirements placed on

the unit to conduct the board. However, like COA 1 this COA fails to address the critical components that we seek to evaluate and develop in junior NCOs. COA 3 is the only method to assess the Soldier that is completely objective nature. The inherent standardization that this creates allows for uniformity and consistency in evaluating potential promotion candidates. It is also the only COA that provides for the development and assessment of the Soldier that fills the needs of identifying the Soldier with the skills necessary to lead in our Army at war. These two resultant effects generated by COA 3 is the best fit to meet the purpose of AR 600-8-19, Chapter 1, paragraph 1 which as stated is “to provide for career progression and rank that is in line with potential, recognizing the best qualified soldier that will attract and retain the highest caliber Soldier for a career in the Army.”

Conclusion

The Army’s need to select and promote the most highly qualified Soldiers has never been more relevant than during a period of war such as we face today. Leveling the standard across the board and assessing the critical tasks that we expect of junior NCOs is the most critical element of the promotion process. Under the current system of semi-centralized promotions, I believe that this goal is unattainable and changes need to made to the mindset of senior Army leadership. COA 3 is the answer. It eliminates the dilemmas created by unintentional biases that were built into the cold war formula currently used. It efficiently and equitably evaluates promotion candidates on critical skills required of junior NCOs. It has the more significant impact of broadening the knowledge base of Soldiers as it relates to real world leadership issues and sharpening the edge of the warrior ethos in all.

References

AR 600-8-19. (10 January 2006). Enlisted Promotions and Reductions. Retrieved 1 December 2006 from <http://www.usapa.army.mil>